

# The Old School Spies

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## **HONORABLE TREACHERY** **A History of U.S. Intelligence,** **Espionage, and Covert Action from the** **American Revolution to the CIA**

By G.J.A. O'Toole  
Atlantic Monthly Press, 591 pp. \$29.95

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## **THE OLD BOYS** **The American Elite and the** **Origins of the CIA**

By Burton Hersch  
Scribner's, 536 pp. \$29.95

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**By Byron Farwell**

**J**ULIA CHILD was a U.S. spy in China? The records are still sealed, but it appears doubtful that she was cooking chow mein while employed at the OSS office in Chungking during the Second World War. She is but one of many unlikely people whom G.J.A. O'Toole names in this splendidly written, impeccably researched, and perfectly fas-

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*Byron Farwell's latest books are "Armies of the Raj" and the forthcoming "Stonewall: A Biography of Thomas Jackson."*

cinating history of American involvement in the black arts from the days of George Washington to the Cuban missile crisis.

Some of the characters, particularly such famous Civil War spies as Allan Pinkerton, Rose Greenhow, and perhaps even that daring young balloonist, "Professor" Thaddeus S.C. Lowe, may be well known, but the story of the first U.S. covert operation, performed by William Eaton in North Africa, is probably unfamiliar to most.

Because a Barbary Coast pirate named Yusuf Karamanli was holding American seamen—including 307 naval officers and men—as slaves and demanding an enormous ransom, Eaton, with his government's blessing, formed a mercenary army in Egypt, marched it across the desert, and with some help from guns from U.S. warships, captured one of Karamanli's chief ports and prepared to replace the blackguard with a more amiable emir. This successful operation was aborted, however, by pusillanimous American negotiators, who agreed to pay a reduced ransom and abandoned both Eaton's army and the amiable emir.

A more amusing account, and indicative of the state of the cryptologist's art in America 80

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years ago, is that relating to Herbert O. Yardley, a telegrapher at the State Department in 1912. Although he had only a high school education and no formal training in mathematics, he amused himself during long night watches at State by breaking all of the American diplomatic codes in the messages that came into the office. When his puzzle solving was discovered, unsettled diplomats created more difficult codes—which Yardley continued to break with ease. By 1917 he was in charge of American cipher operations.

**W**ORLD WAR I saw many noted men turning their hands to espionage, particularly in Britain. A.E.W. Mason, popular mystery novelist (*At the Villa Rose*, *The House of the Arrow*) and playwright, went to Mexico disguised as an eccentric lepidopterist. Novelist Somerset Maugham was a covert officer in Switzerland and was scheduled to direct a propaganda campaign in Russia, but the trip was canceled when the Bolsheviks seized power.

At the same time in the United States, spy fever was rampant and German spies were seen under every bush. To track down all sightings and report on the suspicious behavior of friends and neighbors, a large vigilante organization called the American Protective League was formed as an auxiliary of the Department of Justice. In Hollywood, Cecil B. DeMille organized a branch to sniff out spies and saboteurs in the film industry.

As real spies were thin on the ground, the APL's main work was finding draft dodgers. There were, however, other suspicious folk. A Jewish army dentist was dishonorably discharged when it was learned that he came from a section of New York City inhabited by "German and Hungarian Jews." A woman stenographer in the Navy Department who tried to organize her female co-workers to press for equal pay was investigated by the Office of Naval Intelligence and dismissed.

There were, though, a few real German agents. Among them was Anton Dilger, an



BETTMAN ARCHIVE PHOTO REPRINTED IN "THE OLD BOYS"  
President Kennedy with CIA director Allen Dulles (center) and director-designate John McCone

## "Herbert O. Yardley amused himself during long night watches at State by breaking all the American diplomatic codes."

American of German parentage, who in 1914-15 operated a laboratory in Chevy Chase, where he manufactured glanders and anthrax cultures for German agents to use in infecting horses and mules destined for the Allied forces in Europe. Dilger went on to grander things and is thought to have been involved with the explosion of two million pounds of explosives on Black Tom Island in New York City's harbor on the night of July 29, 1916.

At war's end a secret agency, cryptically called the Inquiry, was established by President Wilson to study the terms the Allies demanded in the peace treaty. Its secretary was 28-year-old Walter Lippman and it was financed by the president's Contingent Fund, a secret unvouchered account established in 1790 and perhaps still available to

U.S. presidents.

Between the world wars intelligence activity in this country languished, particularly after Henry L. Stimson, secretary of state, in 1930 discovered to his horror a cipher bureau in his department that read foreign embassies' dispatches. "Gentlemen do not read each other's mail," he said, and closed down the operation. Soviet intelligence, on the other hand, thrived, thanks to Amtorg, a joint trading venture established by Julius and Armand Hammer and the Soviet government that provided a handy commercial cover for agents.

O'Toole gives a detailed account of the successful American efforts to crack Japanese codes and, discounting all conspiracy theories, he provides a plausible answer as to why our forces were surprised by the

Japanese attack upon Pearl Harbor. William Donovan, "the one person in the government responsible for *national* intelligence," was not told that Japan's most secret code had been broken and that thousands of messages were available for decoding. Gen. Short and Adm. Kimmel in Hawaii were also kept in the dark. The shortage of trained translators and cryptanalysts made translations and deciphering slow. "The American intelligence system had developed a capacity to collect information that far exceeded its capacity to analyze it," says O'Toole.

Eventually American intelligence improved and its many successes in World War II proved its worth. According to O'Toole, the U.S. won the Battle of Midway because Adm. Nimitz knew exactly where and when the Japanese planned to attack and with what forces. The postwar successes of the CIA have been fewer and its failures, notably the failure of American intelligence to predict the Korean War and the Bay of Pigs fiasco, have been more dramatic.

**I**T HAS been charged frequently, and Burton Hersh does so again in *The Old Boys*, a breezy account of the last 50 years of American intelligence, that the Office of Strategic Services in World War II, and its successor, the Central Intelligence Agency, are elitist, its key players products of Ivy League schools and prestigious Washington and New York law firms. OSS was said to stand for "Oh So Social." But this has always been the case, it seems. O'Toole says that "from the beginning some of America's most important spies and spy masters have been Ivy Leaguers." From the Revolutionary War to the CIA, our intelligence has been handled by "clubbable young aristocrats." Even Nathan Hale, who regretted that he had but one life to give to his country, was a Yale graduate.

Hersh believes that having our intelligence operations, and particularly our covert actions, in the hands of such elite types is un-American, a threat to our democratic institutions and against the American grain. O'Toole does not think the CIA's elitism as important as the fact that its activities are vital to our national interests; and "clandestine activities," he says, "are as American as apple pie or the bald eagle." ■